

Gustav Hilger: From Hitler's Foreign Office to CIA Consultant

Robert Wolfe

Essays published in *US Intelligence and the Nazis*, and in summaries such as this one by IWG historians, document that human intelligence (“humint”) gleaned from Axis war criminals during the Cold War proved dubious and often downright misleading as a source for the policies and plans of the Soviet Union. Former Axis personnel typically proved **unreliable** as humint assets because they peddled hearsay and gossip, whether to escape retribution for past crimes, or for mercenary gain, or for political agendas not necessarily compatible with American national interests. This unreliability was surpassed only by the harm that ensued from recruiting some who turned out to be double agents.

Among former Third Reich officials who served as US postwar intelligence sources, Dr. Gustav Hilger's recruitment demonstrably offers a case study where security needs outweighed moral considerations. In George Kennan's encomium, Hilger was “one of the few outstanding experts on Soviet economy and...politics, [who] had long practical experience in analyzing and estimating Soviet operations on a day-to-day basis [see attached document].”

There could be no comparable available source. Hilger had spent all but 10 of his nearly 60 years in Czarist and Soviet Russia when American forces captured him in May 1945. He had translated directly from Josef Stalin's lips the dictator's rationale for the mutual benefits to be derived from a Nazi-Soviet pact, a rare opportunity to gain some insight into Stalin's enigmatic mind. Whether he was as clean of Nazi atrocities as his American employers believed is another matter.

Born of German parents in Moscow in 1886, Hilger first set foot in Germany in 1904. Educated as a construction engineer, he was hired in 1910 as its Moscow-based agent by F.Hackenthal & Co., a German machinery firm contracting with Imperial

Russia. In 1912, he married Marie Hackenthal, Moscow-born younger daughter of Hilger's employer. Two children were born to their union.

Interned in Russia as an enemy alien during the First World War, during and after that war until 1923 Hilger represented the German Red Cross and the Nansen Relief agency in repatriating German PoWs and internees. When the Rapallo treaty of 1923 restored German-Russian relations, the German Foreign Office appointed Hilger to its Moscow Embassy staff. During nearly two decades at that embassy, he served four ambassadors, and functioned as interpreter for Ribbentrop during his August-September 1939 negotiations with Molotov and Stalin that led to the Nazi-Soviet Pact. He accompanied the ambassador during his last awkward visit to the Kremlin on June 22, 1941, when the German invasion of Russia was already underway.

Back in Germany, Hilger served in the Foreign Office as Counselor and chief adviser to Ribbentrop on USSR affairs. He espoused the combat deployment of Russian Lt.Gen.Vlasov's defector forces, which fought alongside the Wehrmacht from 1942 until war's end. Hilger strongly endorsed Vlasov's warning that Germany would lose the war unless it enlisted and rewarded the collaboration of Russian anti-Communists. Notoriously, however, Hitler rejected all commitments to any future Russian state because of his racist contempt for Slavs, and his determination to renew and augment his plan for decimating their populations and despoiling them of their European territory as far as the Ural Mountains to enlarge German "living space."

Eleven Activity Reports, each of which summarized salient information from several reports of the genocidal activities of SS mobile units (*Einsatzgruppen*) operating behind the Eastern Front, were circulated to higher echelons of the SS and to collaborating civil ministries and agencies. On receipt of the first five Activity Reports in the Foreign Ministry, Hilger made an administrative decision that it was unnecessary to

“lay the reports before” Ribbentrop. Hilger’s name is listed, and his initials can be discerned, among those of the Foreign Office officials who countersigned as having seen all eleven Activity Reports ultimately received. The clear implication is Hilger’s guilty knowledge—if not complicity in genocide—which as late as 1963 provided fuel for charges that he was a war criminal.

Ribbentrop’s Nuremberg trial defense counsel wanted Hilger as an eyewitness to his Foreign Minister’s major role in negotiating the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 (obviously an attempt to embarrass the Soviet prosecution). The US prosecutors replied that Hilger was in the United States, but too sick to travel. In fact, Hilger was already back in Germany and assigned to the Evaluation Group for the Gehlen Organization, code-named “RUSTY,” a project authorized but ineffectually supervised by the US Army Counterintelligence Corps (CIC).

During the roundup of Italian Jews in late 1943, a note signed "Hilger" recorded Ribbentrop’s concurrence that the Italians be asked to intern the Jews in concentration camps in northern Italy, in lieu of immediate deportation. The SS intended thereby that the Italian Jews and their potential Italian protectors should believe that internment in Italy was the final destination—rather than eventual deportation to the murder mills in Poland to be immediately murdered or gradually worked to death. The stated purpose of this ruse was to minimize the number of Italian Jews who would go into hiding to avoid deportation to Poland. It is thus beyond dispute that Hilger criminally assisted in the genocide of Italy's Jews.

Hilger’s evasion of Nazi Party membership notwithstanding, Hilger’s rank in the Foreign Office hierarchy was sufficient for his automatic arrest and internment at the time of his capture in Salzburg on May 19, 1945. After a brief stay in a PoW cage in Mannheim, he was transported to the United States with other Third Reich civilian and

military officials, where he spent the remainder of 1945 incarcerated at Fort Meade. During some nine-months of internment, Hilger proved his unusual intelligence value with knowledgeable written responses to a series of substantive questions posed by Military Intelligence Service (MIS).

Returned to Germany by January 1946, under the cryptonym "CALABEL-1," Hilger was assigned by US Army intelligence to the RUSTY Evaluation Group. He was, however, not engaged in operational intelligence, only in assessing RUSTY's copious, and frequently worthless, intelligence product. Soviet Intelligence soon learned of Hilger's whereabouts, and requested his rendition as a war criminal to Soviet custody. His wife was arrested in June 1947 and imprisoned; his daughter, and his two granddaughters, living separately under MGB surveillance in the Soviet Zone, were also held hostage to lure Hilger into Soviet service or the *Gulag*.

Thereupon, in an elaborate cloak and dagger operation code-named "FIREWEED," on US Army G2 instructions and under the noses of Soviet military intelligence, RUSTY deputy chief Hermann Baun moved Hilger's family to West Berlin and thence to the US Zone. On October 18, 1947, Hilger was reunited with his family, where he continued as a RUSTY evaluator. One year later, traveling on temporary travel passes provided by OMGUS, the Hilger family was spirited to America and billeted in the Roosevelt Hotel in Washington, DC. Shortly after his second arrival in America, the FBI interviewed Hilger at the behest of J. Edgar Hoover [See attached document]. Soon the family moved to a house at 920 Highland Drive, and after a few months to 9102 Fairview Road, both in Silver Spring, MD. They spent their last years in the America at 1614 Rhode Island Avenue.

Sponsored by Frank Wisner's CIA/OPC psychological warfare operation, code name UMPIRE NCF, designed to lure defectors among Soviet troops in Germany,

Hilger's employment was warmly endorsed by George Kennan and Charles Bohlen [see attached document]. Under the pseudonym Stephen H. Holcomb, he was assigned to continue evaluating RUSTY's product for OPC, although he no longer served with the Gehlen Evaluation Group.

Nevertheless, Hilger's urging contributed to overcoming the reluctance of then Director of CIA, Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, to take over the Gehlen operation from CIC in 1950 under the code name "ZIPPER," an unintended disservice to Hilger's American employers. Henceforth as of June 1950, CIA funded his research and analytic reports on events in the Soviet Union under the code name PBSTEAM AEFORD (formerly PBSTEAM) and his pseudonym of Arthur T. Latter.

OPC and State Department analysts desiring to benefit from Hilger's unique knowledge and experience had to overcome the reluctance of CIA Office of Special Operations (OSO) and security personnel to permit an "enemy alien" access to CONFIDENTIAL, let alone SECRET, documents. Special arrangements were made for him to have office space in the downtown CIA K Street building, but were hedged in by a variety of restrictions and limited permissions, particularly on access to documents—even captured German records, many written by Hilger himself. His reiterated requests for access to current RUSTY/ZIPPER material was apparently delayed, because of fears that this would elicit a Gehlen request for reciprocity, but was finally arranged indirectly through cumbersome CIA channels. Singular, nevertheless, was Richard Helms' objection to Hilger's presence in the CIA K Street building, especially his eating in the cafeteria, because he might blow the cover of covert agents dining there during a home trip from an overseas assignment [see attached document]!

To his American employers, Hilger assiduously endorsed Konrad Adenauer, acting almost as the Chancellor's unofficial representative. It is no surprise, then, that

returning from a trip to West Germany late in September 1953, he disclosed that he had reluctantly accepted a post in the German Foreign Office, the bait being a full pension for the entire period from 1923 to his future retirement in 1956. His American connection was terminated on October 1, his office lease on November 1, and he was established in the Foreign Office Annex in Bonn by December 4, 1953. The following June, he was appointed a Counselor (*Botschaftsrat*) of the West German Foreign Office.

Gustav Hilger retired from the Foreign Office in 1956 at the age of 70, but continued social relations with friends and acquaintances among US Embassy officials, who believed he could help them with contacts to still active German diplomats. He died in Munich in 1965, age 79. His employment during the Cold War seems a rare case where the value of the intelligence he supplied appeared to the United States Government to override his war criminal service to the Third Reich.

6/01/2006

October 19, 1948

Dear Frank:

I am glad to learn that your efforts to bring Gustav Hilger to this country for work with CIA have been successful. I knew him in Moscow during the time that he was Economic Counselor of the German Embassy. I regard him as one of the few outstanding experts on Soviet economy and Soviet politics. He had not only a scholarly background on Soviet subjects but has had long practical experience in analyzing and estimating Soviet operations on a day-to-day basis.

I hope the Department of State may be provided with copies of any studies which Mr. Hilger produces under your direction.

Because the humane and decent thing is sometimes overlooked in the operations of governmental bureaucracy, it may not be out of place for me to observe that I think you have done the right thing in arranging for Mr. Hilger's family to accompany him to the United States.

Sincerely yours,

George F. Kennan

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT

Declassified and Approved for Release
by the Central Intelligence Agency
Date: 2004/2005

FOR COORDINATION WITH State

Mr. Frank Wisner,
Assistant Director, OPC,
Central Intelligence Agency,
Room 152, South Building,
Washington 25, D. C.

SECRET

S/P:JDavies,Jr.:enk



United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.



IN REPLY, PLEASE REFER TO

FILE NO. _____

CONFIDENTIAL
BY SPECIAL MESSENGER

Date: October 19, 1948

To: Director
Central Intelligence Agency
2430 E Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Attention: Mr. Frank G. Wisner,
Assistant Director for Policy Coordination

JEH From: John Edgar Hoover - Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation
Subject: DR. GUSTAV HILGER

Reference is made to your communication dated October 18, 1948 in which you advised that Dr. Gustav Hilger, the former Consular Minister of the German Embassy in Moscow, is arriving in the United States and would be available for interview by this Bureau.

Please be advised that this Bureau is interested in conducting an interview with Dr. Hilger and it is requested that you advise when it will be convenient to conduct this interview.

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT

FOR COORDINATION WITH FBI

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DATE 2000 2005

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CLASSIFIED MESSAGE

SECRET

TO : **XX/G/L**
XT : **49/16/8206**
DATE : **20 September 1960**

ROUTING	
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TO : **MUNICH BASE** **FRANKFURT HEADQUARTERS**

FROM : DIRECTOR

CONF: C/EE 3

INFO: COP, C/CA, C/CI, C/CI/SP, C/FI 2, C/NE 3, S/C 2

DECLASSIFIED

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OPERATIONAL	INITIALS
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OUT 71896

TO : **MUNI** **INFO** **FRAN**

CITE DIR

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UPHILL

REF MUNI 2099 (IN 13808)

1. WITH SAME CAVEATS AS BEFORE YOU MAY ADVISE UPHILL FOLLOWING.
2. LIFE BELIEVES HAVE ENTIRE MATERIAL AMOUNTING 600 PAGES 40 IN EICHMANN HANDWRITING. LIFE CONTRACT ALLOWS REBATE AS THEY SEE FIT EXCEPT TO ISRAEL. LIFE HAS NOT ADVISED ISRAEL, APPARENTLY DOES NOT INTEND TO.
3. ENTIRE MATERIAL HAS BEEN READ. ONE OBSCURE MENTION OF GLOBE WHICH LIFE OMITTING AT OUR REQUEST.
4. UNLESS UPHILL CAN COME UP WITH CONVINCING WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUGGEST YOU DISCUSS WITH WINTERSTEIN WHETHER ANY POSSIBILITY FRITZCH MAY BE PART OF EASTERN SMER GLOBE PLOT OR ATTEMPTING SWindle WITH BOGUS MATERIAL HE KNOWS FEDERER WOULD PAY TO SUPPRESS.

END OF MESSAGE

C/S COMMENT: *REQUESTED HQS SUGGESTIONS RE FURTHER HANDLING WITH UPHILL RE EICHMANN MEMOIRS BEING PUBLISHED.

COORDINATING OFFICERS

COORDINATING OFFICERS

XX/G/CA

AUTHENTICATING OFFICERS

REPRODUCTION BY OTHER THAN THE ISSUING OFFICE IS PROHIBITED.

Copy No.

SECRET

6 July 1950

MEMORANDUM FOR: ADPC

SUBJECT: Arthur T. Latter

1. Last week Mr. Latter informed us that he had been requested by George Kennan to work for him and Mr. Bohler on matters connected with the recent world developments, for a period of about two weeks. As a result, Mr. Latter has been working full time for Kennan and Bohler and will probably not be available to us for another ten days.

2. We had an opportunity, early last week, to secure Mr. Latter's preliminary reaction to the events in Korea. He felt that the move was a natural one for the Soviets who were probing for weakness in our position and who would, if we did not react strongly, take similar offensive actions elsewhere. He believed that as a result of the strong measures taken by the U.S. that the Soviets would avoid developing the present situation into a third World War.

3. He felt that in time the Soviets would take similar action elsewhere on the periphery, and he believed the next push would be toward Iran. He said that the Soviets might very well use Chinese Communist troops in Korea, but he was not sure on this point. He felt that the strong U.S. measures had taken the Soviets completely by surprise, and this explained the lack of a real positive reaction on their part.

4. These are roughly his preliminary reactions which he expressed before he had an opportunity to really fully digest the Korean situation and its implications.

Chief, EE

Distr:
ADPC - Original
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JUL 10 1950

OFC REGISTRY	
100-370	
DATE	6 July 1950

SECRET

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Date: 2005

SECRET

28 February 1950

TO : Chief, I & S
VIA : STC
FROM : FDM
SUBJECT: Dr. Gustav Hilger

1. This noon the undersigned had lunch in the K Building cafeteria where subject was also eating. Subsequently inquiry was made of [] of OPC regarding the advisability from a security standpoint of permitting subject to use these facilities. [] replied that subject had been authorized to enter the K Building and eat in the cafeteria by Chief, I & S.

2. From the FDM point of view a serious security consideration is raised by subject's continued presence in the K Building cafeteria. Not only do many representatives of our installation in Germany eat there while in this country on TDY but also various departmental members of FDM who have met subject professionally are seen there in the presence of other members of OSG. This of necessity permits numerous members of this organization to be seen, and in some cases identified, by subject.

3. As you know, subject was formerly associated with Odeum in Germany. He is unquestionably well in touch by mail with members of that operation. We have no idea at what juncture parts of Odeum may become identified with the West German Government. This is an additional reason why it would seem undesirable for subject to be in a position to assemble personality information on this organization.

4. We have no desire in this memorandum to single out subject for attention. He is undoubtedly anti-Communist and anti-Soviet and his background fits him to make a substantial contribution to the work of CIA. The fact remains, however, that in the opinion of the undersigned, it is an undesirable practice to permit foreign Nationals to use the K Building cafeteria.

17D COPY

[]
Richard Helms

cc - OPC

SECRET

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Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

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